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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2387

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0158

RHMFISS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000319

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E - MBEYZEROV

PARIS FOR RKANEDA

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/04/2018

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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: CRACKDOWN TO BE TESTED THIS WEEK

REF: A. ANTANANARIVO 302

[¶](#)B. ANTANANARIVO 292

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

[¶](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Since the violence of April 20 to 24, the HAT has effectively maintained control on the streets by banning assemblies and intimidating the opposition, although this will be tested by this week's scheduled reopening of parliament. The last week has seen a diplomatic visit to four imprisoned parliamentarians, possible internal dissent on the HAT's election calendar, a much-publicized Saudi investment tour, and some invitations sent in error to the HAT President from the UN family. Following is a brief review of the latest events in Madagascar. END SUMMARY.

[¶](#)2. (C) CRACKDOWN ON THE OPPOSITION: Since banning public assemblies on April 21, the High Transitional Authority (HAT) has effectively maintained control on the streets of Tana by intervening rapidly when crowds start to form, and arresting opposition leaders. The recently-formed "Mixed National Investigate Committee" (CNME), under the controversial leadership of Commandant Charles Randriantsoavina, has led the crackdown. In addition to Madagascar's "legalist" opposition Prime Minister, Manandafy Rakotonirina, the CNME has now arrested one senator, three deputies of the National Assembly, the head of security at the High Constitutional Court, the head of the pro-Ravalomanana "Legalist Women", and has played a role in the politically charged removal of the Director General of the state anti-corruption unit, BIANCO. Since the violence of April 23/24, the opposition has managed only to hold smaller gatherings on the private property of Tiko-owned Magro store in Ankorondrano, which was burnt in the January 26 looting.

[¶](#)3. (SBU) PRISON VISITS: Ambassador Marquardt organized the visit to the four imprisoned parliamentarians in Antanimora Prison on Friday, May 1, along with the French and South African ambassadors and the German and European Union charges. The parliamentarians, all from the generally pro-Ravalomanana Vakinankaratra Region, were arrested, again by Commandant Charles Randriantsoavina, on April 23 for allegedly distributing money and weapons to demonstrators, although their charges later expanded to include incitement to violence and supporting a coup attempt. They reported harsh treatment during and immediately after their arrest, but reasonable treatment in the prison itself. After briefly appearing before a prosecutor on April 25, they were denied bail and placed in "preventative detention", and currently expect to return to court only around May 13 or 14. As parliament was not currently in session, these members will not benefit from any form of immunity; once session is open (see para 4), it is not clear if their status will change. Press coverage of the visit was generally neutral, although

pro-HAT "La Gazette" predictably questioned the "pro-Ravalomanana" international community's motives, and particularly Ambassador Marquardt's. On Tuesday the Ambassador and other colleagues will join in a visit organized by UN Mediator Drame to legalist "PM" Manandafy Rakotonirina and the head of the "Legalist Women", currently held separately in Manjakandriana and Mantasoa, each some 50km east of Tana.

¶4. (SBU) PARLIAMENT PLANS TO OPEN, DESPITE SUSPENSION: The HAT's contested "suspension" of Parliament will be tested tomorrow, May 5, as anti-HAT members of both the Senate and National Assembly attempt to open the constitutionally-mandated spring session. Jacques Sylla, President of the National Assembly and former lead negotiator for Ravalomanana in February, last week led a group of 30 members of parliament in declaring support for the HAT - and even endorsing its suspension of parliament. Anti-HAT members, however, point out that the constitution has no provision for "suspending" parliament, and thus do not recognize Andry Rajoelina's March 19 ordinance to that effect. The deputies plan to march from an undisclosed located to the National Assembly building in Tsimbazaza on the morning of May 5; the HAT has not yet indicated how it will respond.

¶5. (SBU) NO CHANGE TO ELECTION CALENDAR: Contradicting reports that HAT Foreign Minister Ny Hasina Andriamanjato had announced support for elections by the end of 2009 while in Addis Ababa last week, the MFA has released a statement announcing that "presidential elections cannot be held by the end of this year". The statement indicated that the election

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calendar will be debated further during the national conference to be held before June 26, but that this remains a question to be resolved "amongst Malagasy".

¶6. (SBU) MIDDLE-EASTERN PROMISES (AND UN INVITATIONS): A Saudi Arabian investment delegation, led by Sheikh Nasser Abdullah al Mushaeghay, was welcomed by HAT PM Monja and FM Andriamanjato over the weekend. Faced with a looming post-coup fiscal crisis, the HAT enthusiastically promoted the possible USD \$2 billion Saudi investment in hotels and communication services, as well as energy and construction materials; a formal press conference is expected Thursday. In his remarks on May 2, al Mushaeghay declared that Madagascar "had taken the path of change and development", and stated his explicit support for the HAT. A similar delegation is also expected from the United Arab Emirates in the coming weeks. The HAT is doing its utmost to exploit this interest as a sign of diminishing isolation. Similarly, they have used the media to highlight various invitations from the UN and its constituent organizations which were addressed, apparently in error, to the unrecognized HAT President. The UN reportedly will endeavor to avoid future such invitations.

MARQUARDT